

## wormwood and wire by rosesburnedalive

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - College/University, Angst, Fluff, Happy Ending, Internalized Homophobia, Intricate Rituals and Literary References, Mutual Pining, Rated T for Trashmouth, Slow Burn, Sonia Kaspbrak's A+ Parenting, should be titled: reddie's hot girl summer, theyre all 20-22, this turned into HGTV but with the losers

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

**Relationships:** Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

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**Summary:**

Bev knocks her shoulder against his.

“Richie imprinted on you like some half-witted, nicotine addicted duckling in second hand Doc Martens.” The smirk on her face tells Eddie that she finds this observation both amusing and entertaining. Great.

“That’s...scarily accurate.”

Or, it’s 1996 and Bev’s uncle owns a summer house called Blackthorn Manor that sits in the woods of upstate Maine near the small town of Monmouth Falls. It's old and practically falling apart; which happens to be the reason why Bev volunteers to spend the summer before her senior year of college fixing it up. What happens when brings a few friends along to help?

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“The emotion is Janus-faced: we are torn between a nostalgia for the familiar and an urge for the foreign and strange. As often as not, we are homesick most for the places we have never known.”

— Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*

“I will remember your small room, the feel of you, the light in the window, your records, your books, our morning coffee, our noons, our nights, our bodies spilled together, sleeping, the tiny flowing currents, immediate and forever, your leg my leg, your arm my arm, your smile and the warmth of you who made me laugh again.”

— Charles Bukowski, *Raw With Love*

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February 3rd, 2016. Seattle, Washington. 2:34am.

Richie keeps a tin box under his bed. The box, a worn and battered thing, sits under his bed like a corpse of another life. It's small and the paint has chipped with age but the words “*Scaferlati Levant Superieur*” are legible in a clear, deliberate font. He had found it in the attic of Blackthorn under a pile of cable-knit sweaters and wool pants, and he really hadn't known why he had taken it. Hell, he still doesn't. But he's glad he did.

In it is a well-loved leather notebook, filled with musings and memories and half-formed dispositions jotted down at three in the morning, a button, a bottle cap, a dried flower, and stacks and stacks of polaroids he'd taken over that summer of 1996 tied together with multicolored rubber bands. He doesn't have to look at any of it—he memorized it all years ago.

Out of everything, though, the one thing he has never let himself memorize is the letter. He can count the number of times that he's

read it on one hand—for that, he only needs three fingers. He's achingly conscious of the fact that it's a little pathetic, really; how little he's able to read of it without losing himself.

Some nights, if he has had too much to drink or if his insomnia has kept him up for a few days, and he finally passes out in a daze of NyQuil and benadryl, Richie will dream about Blackthorn Manor. Twenty year since that summer and the house is just as vivid in his mind as it was the day he first drove up the dirt driveway. In the dream it's always dawn, and he's always the only one awake. Or maybe he's the only one there.

Either way the house is empty.

Tonight, though, the dream starts with him standing at the bottom of the wooden steps that lead up to the front porch. It must have rained earlier because there's dew on the lilacs and the steps are damp. He walks up and finds the door, white paint peeling slightly, open just a smidgen. It creaks as he walks in.

He's looking for something, someone perhaps, but he doesn't know what, so he walks through the house without sense. The hallways, the living room, the library, all of it cluttered and dusty. All the furniture has white sheets thrown over them. Misshapen ghosts.

The sound of his footsteps echoing off the scarred floorboards keeps him company and the smell of wisteria, drifting through open windows, is especially fragrant; the smell hangs rich and heavy in the air, mingled with the smell of bergamot, and black China tea, and the faint inky smell of beeswax polish. Everything looks like it did at the beginning of that summer twenty years ago. Yellow wallpaper curling and flaking off the walls. A breeze fluttering the moth-eaten curtains. In the breakfast nook next to the kitchen, near a low bookshelf, sits a round dining table set for seven. A pack of cigarettes—Lucky Strikes—lays open and empty next to Bev's plate.

He knows this house better than any place he has ever lived. That stair creaks. That door gets jammed after it rains. That floorboard is loose and if you remove it there's a stash of stale Marlboros and a dried up bottle of sangria tucked away.

Off in another room a song starts playing. Tinny and soft; Pink Floyd's Time. He climbs the stairs and tracks the music down to what had been his room when they had all stayed here. It looks barren without his posters and his guitar in the corner and the lights he and Bev strung up over the window one night but it still feels the same.

The record player sits on the carlton house desk across from his bed, like it always has. He takes the needle off the vinyl and the house sits quiet again. Alive and dead.

Vegetative.

"I thought you left," a voice says behind him. He turns and Eddie, in his familiar too big knit sweater with the too long sleeves and his knee-high socks and yellow corduroy shorts, is standing in the doorway. He's got a steaming cup of Earl Grey in his hands and that journal tucked under his arm, predictably. Unlike the house, Eddie looks just like he did when they had left Blackthorn. A thousand freckles, a tan on his skin, a scar on his cheek.

The light from the window casts onto his face, illuminating his features until it's a shock to look at him, so Richie turns away. He wonders if this is what grief is supposed to feel like or if this is just an ache for something else.

"I thought I did, too." Richie replies. It feels more like an admission of guilt than anything.

And suddenly he's awake.

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"Fuck me." Richie digs the heels of his hands into his eyes and takes a deep breath. He feels like shit and he's fucking tired. It's been over a week since he slept more than two or three hours a night and his head has been aching for the past three days. He sits up in his bed and flaps his hands a bit to relieve tension, trying his best not to wake up Marmalade who's curled up beside him.

It's far too early to be awake right now and while he does have to be up in a few hours for some bullshit meeting he certainly won't be able to fall asleep again. So, Richie slides onto the floor and grabs the

tin. A bit of the orange paint flakes off when he grabs it, so he wipes his hands on his sweatpants and settles on the floor with his back resting against his bed.

He only lets himself open the box is after these dreams. If he doesn't hold himself back, if he lets himself look at them whenever he wanted to, he would risk the possibility of staring at them all day like the sentimental sap he is. And, god, that would ruin his image, wouldn't it?

But looking at them now, tied up in stacks with multicolored rubber bands, it's hard to imagine a life without them. Mike and Stan sitting in the basement, showercap covered heads bent over a book. Bill's bike leaning against a tree near the lake. Eddie sitting on the porch tying his shoe with his tongue peeking out the side of his mouth and his eyebrows drawn, bandaids over scraped knees and a streak of dirt across his cheek. Bev, with her head thrown back in laughter, and Ben, looking at her with a fond smile, ice cream cones melting and dripping down their fingers.

Richie had started taking pictures at the start of the summer at Blackthorn and stashed them away in the tin. He had found the camera in the back of an antique store and bought it for two crumpled twenty dollar bills and a handful of nickels. It was old and smelled weird and someone put a frog sticker on the side of it and it was *his* .

As soon as he got out of the store he had scratched his name on the bottom with his keys and took the 'I love Derry's Ice Cream Parlor' button Bev had given him off of his jacket and pinned it to the strap around his neck.

He had liked the sound the camera made. Like the tick of a watch and the familiar hum of a record. *Click* . *Whirr* . You were here, you existed here. *Click* . Here, you existed. *Whirr* . A physical record of a state of being in one moment, and the death of it the next. but the person you were then is dead now. A reminder that he can never go back. A collection of gravestones.

His favorite photo, though, sits on his bedside table, nestled between the pages of his copy of Calder's *Dead Boys* . He had taken it during

movie night sometime towards the end of their stay at Blackthorn. The rest of the Losers had fallen asleep—Bev, on the couch with her arm propping up her head against the armrest, Mike with his head in her lap and Ben tucked into the corner to her left, leaning over the armrest. Bill and Stan had both squeezed into the loveseat across from Richie and Stan, twenty minutes into the movie, had fallen asleep on Bill's shoulder with the bowl of popcorn sitting precariously in his lap. Bill drifted off soon after with his cheek rested on top of Stan's curls.

Eddie had been the only one still awake besides Richie. He was bleary-eyed from the late hour and wrapped up in a blanket and one of Richie's sweatshirts that Richie had thrown at him because he couldn't stop complaining about how cold it was. He was sitting on the floor with his back against Richie's chair but turned around at the sound of Richie pulling his camera out.

In the photo, Eddie is slightly washed out from the camera's flash while everyone else is a silhouette, and he's looking at Richie instead of the camera. His smile and eyes are soft and Richie wants nothing more than to see Eddie like that for the rest of his life.

The gravestone for this one reads 'HERE LIES YOUR CHILDHOOD, GONE TOO SOON. IT WILL NOT REST IN PEACE AND NEITHER WILL YOU.'

Richie slams the lid back on the tin and tosses the thing back under the bed. It doesn't matter how long it's been; it still hurts.

Marmalade meows right into his ear and jumps off the bed onto his lap.

"Fuck! Shit! You scared me you sadistic little shit, what the fuck!"

Marmalade pushes against his chin and meows again. If Richie had any mind at all he'd take her out back and lock the door but he's never had the heart. She's twice as big as she was when Mike had found her as kitten cowering underneath the back porch—drenched from the rain and missing half an ear. Eddie and Bev had doted on the thing; knitting her little sweaters and letting her sit on top of their shoulders or sleep in their beds but Marm hadn't taken to

Richie. Or him to her. That was fine by him; any more than five minutes of snuggling with the cat would have ended up with him sneezing up a storm and breaking into hives. They had tolerated each other well enough. Marmalade would leave him be and he'd feed her the occasional tablescrap. It was a good deal. Quid pro quo and all that shit.

"Hey there, Marm," Richie says and pets her, "What's new pussycat?"

Marmalade was a stupid name for a cat in Richie's opinion but Stan had made it official when he tied a bottle cap loosely around her neck with twine and messily scrawled her name on it in sharpie. It was fitting, he supposes, but Galactica would have been cooler. Or The Hulk. Marmalade replies with a purr and trots over to the door, only turning around to make sure he's following as she left his bedroom.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm coming you mangy beast, stop getting your tail in a twist."

How he got stuck with her is beyond him. At least modern medicine made it so that he wouldn't die just because he held her for more than a couple minutes. He grabs *Dead Boys* off his nightstand. Marmalade has jumped up onto the island by the time he gets to the kitchen and is meowing at him so he opens the fridge and grabs two slices of ham, shoving one in his mouth and tossing the other next to Marmalade to shut her up.

"There you go, m'lady," he says, bowing. He walks to the front door and puts on his jacket, grabs his keys and wallet, and tucks *Dead Boys* under his arm. He pats his pockets to make sure he's got a pack of Lucky Strikes. "Now, if you allow me, Your Royal Nuisance, I'm going to go for a walk. Please do not tear up the toilet paper this time; it's my last roll and I don't feel like going to the store right now."

Marmalade ignores him for the ham.

"Sounds about right. Alright, farewell demon cat."

He's tired and his head hurts and there's something not quite real about any of this, like he is dreaming still. He pulls the picture of the

losers out of the book and sticks it in his wallet.

Bev. Stan. Mike. Ben. Bill. Eds.

All of them, somehow, came together. They did not nor have they ever held anything in common, nothing except the absence of a home to go to and a summer trapped in a decrepit pseudo-mansion. And if love is a thing held in common, he supposes they had that in common, too.

He lights up a cigarette and heads out the door.

### **Author's Note:**

next chapter: we hop in the delorean and leave behind 2016 to travel to the summer of 1996

if you'd like to stalk me or tell me to hurry up and post the next chapter:

[main tumblr](#)

[art tumblr](#)

[stan twitter](#)

i also made a [playlist](#) and a [pinterest board](#) for this fic because i like to pretend that i'm productive when i'm procrastinating